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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2101
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LAHORE 000133

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: CHRISTIANS ATTACKED IN KASUR

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A drunken fistfight erupted into an alleged incident of blasphemy, which sparked a mob attack on a Christian community in rural Punjab, prompting 700 people to flee their homes June 30. Federal Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti offered compensation to the affected families on July 4, but several human rights activists remain concerned that the government has swept the incident under the rug. End Summary.

Street Fight Turns Into Mob Violence

¶2. (SBU) The June 30 mob attack on a Christian community in rural Kasur district in Punjab originated with a non-faith-based fistfight after a car refused to allow a tractor pulling a trailer of Christians to pass him on the road, according to Joseph Francis, National Director of the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS). After Muhammad Riaz, the Muslim driver of the car, lost the fight to the Christian driver, Francis detailed, Riaz registered a First Incident Report (FIR) against the Christians of the village. Although a Christian group approached the police to file an FIR against Riaz, local police declined the application, according to the CLAAS fact-finding report. Reverend Majid Abel, Pastor of the Presbyterian Naulakha Church in Lahore who visited the area on July 4, told poloffs on July 6 the local police may have received a separate FIR claiming blasphemy against four Christians but have not acted on these charges.

¶3. (SBU) Several hours after the quarrel, a local imam announced from his mosque's loudspeaker that the Christians had committed blasphemy, Francis related to poloff. As a result, as many as 400 Muslims, led by the Imam, attacked the houses of the Christian community after the police failed to arrest the Christian, according to the CLAAS report. The press reported that the mob burned houses, disconnected electricity, cut off water supply, beat villagers with sticks, and stole money and jewelry. The CLAAS report noted that while the team toured Bahmin Wala village in the aftermath of the violence, the local cleric urged Muslims to kill Christians from the loudspeakers of the mosque. The Imam further declared that any Muslim that provided food and water to the Christians would be exiled from the community, the report states. "After being forced from their homes, the villagers spent the night in the field, without food or water," reported Reverend Majid. CLAAS staff transported two women and four children with acid burns to the CLAAS Rehabilitation Center in Lahore, said Francis. He recounted that a Christian woman was bathing when the attackers entered her home and dragged her from her home naked. Reverend Majid Abel, who provided poloff with pictures from his visit, stated on July 6 this same woman attempted suicide the next day.

No Action Against the Perpetrators

¶4. (SBU) Asif Aqeel, Executive Director of the Community Development Initiative, told poloff July 6 that he and Member of

the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Amina Buttar met with District Coordination Officer (DCO) and District Police Officer (DPO) on July 4. Aqeel reported that the DPO has delayed the filing of an FIR against the Muslim community. The Muslims have "demanded an FIR first be registered against the Christian community for blasphemy as there are only 137 Christian families and more than one million Muslims in Kasur and things would go out of control if there was religious turmoil," Aqeel explained.

15. (SBU) Federal Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti visited the village on July 4, promised to distribute 100,000 rupees to 70 affected families, and declared peace in the village, Aqeel narrated. Kasur Tehsil Nazim Agha Naved Hashim also pledged Rs 20,000 to each family, he stated. He noted that the DCO of Kasur assured him and MPA Amina Buttar that checks would be distributed this week to the affected families. "Victims see this money as a way to buy their silence," Reverend Majid Abel told poloff on July 4. "People do not want money, they want justice," he commented. "Shahbaz Bhatti visited, gave a speech and declared peace had been restored, but women were still crying and people were not happy with the announcement," he complained. "The focus has been on getting the Christians to say that they forgive. Peace can only be reached if those that are responsible are charged with a crime. Then the two communities can sit and make peace," he explained.

16. (SBU) Approximately 25 members of CLAAS and its sister organization Sharing Life Ministries called for the registration of an FIR against the attackers in a July 6 protest outside the Lahore Press Club. Reverend Majid told poloffs that villagers had initially planned to participate in these protests, but "when the buses showed up to bring them this morning, no one was willing to come." Aqeel confirmed that Father Parvaiz Raza, the

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local parish priest in Kasur, announced in a public gathering on July 5 that the Lahore gathering would "sabotage their reconciliation efforts." "What we want is to bring this crime to the public's attention and those responsible be brought to justice," said Reverend Majid, who planned to travel to Kasur again on July 7.

Lahore High Court Takes Notice

17. (SBU) The Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court took suo motu notice of the case on July 10. He ordered the appearance of Kasur District Police officer and the Station House Officer along with the complete record, according to press. The Chief Justice directed local authorities to ensure security for the Christian community, according to press. A Christian activist told the Daily Times that the High Court's intervention will help.

18. (SBU) Comment. The mob violence in Kasur adds to the list of unfortunate incidents that demonstrate the ease with which radicals can invoke blasphemy charges to incite riots that satisfy their own grievances. Although the local authorities have so far refused to follow up on the formal blasphemy charge, their reluctance to detain and punish the perpetrators illustrates the powerlessness of the Christian community. Post will continue to monitor the status in the village, and government action to resolve the issue. End Comment.
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